

What is prayer?

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Living with God › Prayer

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Prayer is communication with God. That is very special, since God is not physically present on earth, so we can't see or hear Him with our five senses. Moreover, God is holy and we humans are not. But He wants a relationship with us. When we pray, we can speak to God aloud or in silence, and He will hear us (see Jeremiah 29:12; 2 Chronicles 7:12; 2 Chronicles 30:27; 2 Kings 20:5; Psalm 6:9).

Can everybody pray?

The most beautiful definition of prayer in the Bible is from a woman who said "I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord" (1 Samuel 1:15). God is not so much interested in the words we say, but what is in our hearts. So, we may take anything that is important to us in prayer to the Lord, and tell Him about it in our own words. We don't need saints or angels to pray for us. We can pray directly to God.

It can be helpful sometimes to ask a pastor or a Christian friend to pray for us. Actually, the Bible encourages us to pray for one another: “I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people...” (1 Timothy 2:1, see also Acts 12:5; Colossians 1:3; Colossians 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:25; James 5:16). However, this should never hold us back from praying by ourselves.

God Himself helps us to pray

This is based on the Lord Jesus’ words that we should pray in His name (John 16:23-24). It is an acknowledgment that all God’s blessings are flowing to us through Jesus Christ. As with everything we do, our prayers are not perfect. But there is a great promise in the Bible that encourages all believers. God Himself helps us to pray as we should through His Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:26 says: “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.” What is meant here, is

that the Holy Spirit guides us in our prayers. What a beautiful thought: God wants us to pray to Him. He knows how weak we are, and how difficult it is to pray in the right way. So, God the Holy Spirit inspires us to direct the words to God that God desires.

When should we pray?

We can always pray, and from anywhere. There are special times of prayer when God's church meets. There are times of prayer in our families. There are individual times of prayer when we are alone with God. But we may also pray continuously throughout the day. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says: "pray without ceasing". With words spoken aloud or in our hearts, we may bring all the things that we see, experience, or think about before the Lord. For prayer is the life breath of the Christian.

This does not mean that we should literally pray every moment of our lives, but that there should be a continual pattern of prayer in our daily lives. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul uses different words for the same concept: "Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in

it with thanksgiving” (Colossians 4:2). And we could add many more Bible texts that urge us to pray regularly.

What is the purpose of prayer?

Prayer has various aims.

First of all, it is meant for the glory of God . We praise Him for who He is, and for what He has done for us. This can be very general, for example “May your name be honored”. It can also be very specific and personal: “Lord, I thank you so much for your grace, I praise You for your endless love for me.”

Secondly, prayer is a means to bring our needs before God. We may tell Him about our troubles and fears, about our physical and spiritual needs. We can also pray for other people around us. In Luke 11:9, Jesus promises: “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.”

With the Source of Life, we will grow spiritually . Even if God does not always change our circumstances as we

ask Him, He can carry us through our difficulties and make us holy.

How should we pray?

The Lord Jesus teaches us how to pray. In Matthew 6, He first of all says that we should not use prayer as a religious ceremony to impress others. He also teaches us the Lord's prayer in Matthew 6:9-13:

“ Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen ”

Most Christians have memorized this prayer. We know that when we pray this prayer, we pray according to God's will. But this prayer also teaches us what is important when we pray using our own words:

We talk to God as to our Father , who loves us and takes care of us.

We give glory to God. We praise Him in our prayers.

We confess that God's plans are more important than our plans, and that we desire for His plans to come true.

We pray for our daily needs. We trust that God will take care of us.

We pray for the forgiveness of our sins , in the knowledge that God has already forgiven us in the Lord Jesus.

We pray God will help us to lead a life that is honoring Him.

We acknowledge the greatness of God. Usually, we end our prayers with something like "We pray this in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen."

Does God hear our prayers?

The Lord knows and hears our prayers. This does not mean that we always get what we want – be it a new car, a fruitful career, or whatever. Fortunately not, for we would

probably ask for a lot of things that are not at all profitable for us. There are some circumstances in which God will not listen to our prayers, for example when we live in sin and don't want to confess our sins and turn from them (Psalm 66:18, Proverbs 28:9).

Another case in which God won't give us what we ask for, is when we ask for something which will not be good for us, with the purpose to use it for our sinful desires (James 4:3), or when our request is not in line with His will for us (1 John 5:14, Psalm 37:4, Matthew 7:11, Luke 22:42). Since we know God as our loving Father, we can trust that He knows best what is good for us and is very willing to give us exactly that. Sometimes God will answer our prayers in a way or at a time we did not expect. But God will always answer our prayers in the way that is best for us and for the cause of His Kingdom.

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